A strange sound came from Kirk, almost like a sob. "You bastard! You filthy, green-blooded bastard! Why aren't you fighting me? The stun has worn off...I know it has! Fight me...you coward! You traitor! Fight!" He crashed his fist down on Spock's back, knocking the breath from him, then sank his teeth savagely in the Vulcan's shoulder, drawing blood.

Spock still refused to move. "No," he grated through his teeth. "It's your revenge. You take it. I won't make it easier for you."

"Easier for me by fighting me?" Kirk scoffed. "You're a fool...or a masochist."

"I am neither. But I do know you far better than you wish to believe."

"You're crazy!" Kirk snapped, but the anger seemed to have drained from him, too, leaving only purpose. He moved inside Spock again, quickening his pace, as if anxious to have it over. In a few moments he reached climax. He slid off Spock and lay on his back, arm flung over his face. He looked more defeated than Spock had ever seen him.

Another wave of sadness washed over Spock, so intense he felt his throat tighten. For the first time since he'd been a very young child, he felt like weeping. And suddenly, with blinding insight, he was certain that Kirk felt the same. Beside him the human's body was trembling slightly.

"Kirk..." he whispered, starting to reach out, some deep instinct telling him to do something, say something.

"What happens now?" Kirk asked hollowly. "Are you going to try to rape me now? Kill me? The knife's on the floor beside you."

"No, I don't wish to harm you. I--" Spock stopped, confused by what he did feel. "Kirk, we can forget what has happened. We must. I do not want this to destroy what we had."

Kirk didn't seem to hear. "It didn't help. I thought hurting you was what I needed, but it didn't work. It should have. I trusted you, and you...."

Spock pulled Kirk's arm away from his face. "I was wrong in what I did, Kirk. I regret it. Like you, I thought all desires could only be satisfied by taking. But I do not believe that is what either of us need. Perhaps we need to...give. It is a lonely universe."

The hazel eyes were filled with pain and doubt. A single tear had slipped from the long lashes to trickle down his cheek. Spock didn't think Kirk was even aware of it, or would have denied it hotly if he was. Kirk turned his head away, unwilling to reveal his weakness. "I don't know what you're talking about," he muttered. "You're talking crazy again. Like you did before you gave up that insane idea about changing the Empire."

"Perhaps it was not so insane after all," Spock mused. "Even if we cannot alter this wretched civilization, we might be able to change our own part of it. Why must we continue to be cruel to each other, when that is not what we want at all?" Spock touched Kirk's face softly, turning it back so he could watch it. "We need one another, Kirk. Why are we so afraid to admit it?"

Kirk's gaze flickered uncertainly. "I don't need anyone. I never have. Least of all you. What are you trying to do to me?"

"I'm trying to make you understand, and it is difficult because I do not understand it well, myself. I...crave something more from life than to take...continually taking, with no place for tenderness or compassion. I think that is the lack we both feel. There is another path we can choose."

Spock thought Kirk would pull away from his touch, refuse to listen to this uncharacteristic talk of tenderness. But the human didn't move. His expression was serious and thoughtful. Encouraged, Spock stroked his fingers across the fair cheek, even daring to brush away the unguarded tear. "Is it so inconceivable, Kirk? That we can feel something other than hatred or anger, or take an action not motivated by greed or self-interest? Can we not even try?"

Kirk swallowed and closed his eyes. "I don't know any other way, Spock." His voice lowered to a shakey whisper. "I don't know how to be...gentle."

"Nor I," Spock answered. The hard knot of anxiety in his stomach melted at the human's hesitant admission. "But we can learn...if we wish to."

"I don't know...the idea, it's kind of scary. Maybe I'd be a fool to open up that much." But his hand moved out hesitantly. Before Kirk could change his mind and pull back again, Spock took the hand and interlaced their fingers.

"I will not break your trust again, Kirk." He paused, surprised at the sudden rush of unnamed emotion. "Please believe me...Jim."

Kirk's eyes widened, and a mocking smile curved his mouth. "No one has called me that since my mother died."

"If you would prefer that I didn't--"

"No..." The smile deepened, lightening, becoming genuine. "It sounds good."

Impulsively, Spock leaned over and kissed him. Kirk drew back, startled. For an endless moment he considered the consequences of becoming so vulnerable. It was not an easy thing for either of them. He'd lived too long by the rules of their universe--and very successfully. It was true for Spock as well. They were risking much by admitting they needed something softer.

Finally Kirk took a deep breath. His arms slid around the Vulcan's shoulders, his body unguarded and open. "Okay," he said softly, more to himself than to Spock, "okay...."

His mouth met Spock's tentatively, testing how it felt to perform this intimate gesture without lust or even arousal, just for tenderness. For a long time they simply held each other, the contentment building slowly as they both began to accept this strange new closeness. He felt absurdly safe, cut off and cushioned from the viciousness of the Empire. He began to realize how uniquely wonderful it would be to be able to totally drop his guard and relax in another's embrace. Even with Marlena he had felt the need for caution--and he had come closer to having a real relationship with her than with any other woman. Close enough to confide in her about the tantalus field, although he had regretted it immediately after--in fact, that was the point at which their affair began to cool. But this feeling with Spock was so very different...so serene and comfortable.

Eventually Kirk stirred restlessly against the Vulcan, his hand sliding enticingly down the lean back. "I almost wish we could keep sex out of this," Kirk murmured. "But I don't think I can change that much."